

# THE ART OF GETTING WRECKED

A MAN, A QUEST, AND A CARIBBEAN ADVENTURE

**Peter Roren**

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# 1. A Genealogical Dive

Where do I start?

Maybe at the beginning. Beginnings are important. I often think how great Jehovah is- he who created birth and death, and put death at the end of life, not at the beginning.

So, let me begin with the beginning.

Who am I?

My name is Peter Roren.

For the full picture I'll have to go back in time and do a genealogical dive into the past.

There are two sides to me, my mother's and my father's.

My great-great grandfather, on my father's side, Henrik Øhlenschlager, or something like this, was a travelling German troubadour and court jester who, for some unknown reason, made his way northwards and settled down in Bergen on the west coast of Norway. I know very little about him other than that he was quite a flamboyant guy and extremely popular with the high society ladies in the city between the seven mountains. He changed lovers, plans, and interests as often as he changed his underwear. His last venture in his turbulent and unsettled life was to turn a herring cannery into a distillery in order to produce a potent and lethal spirit made out of a mixture of nettles and the hollow stems of dandelion. He changed his name from Øhlenschlager to something more Norse, Røyrvin (meaning tube-wine). He died of a massive overdose of his own wine

when he was in the prime of his life, only 35 years old. Where family background is concerned, not really much to brag about there.

Henrik's only son, my great-grandfather Roald on my father's side, was chairman of the Sons of Norway Temperance Movement. He found his father's death quite an embarrassment, sold the distillery business, and changed his surname from Røyrvin to Røren. He had his father's restlessness, flamboyancy, and way around the ladies. Extensive gambling put him in serious debt, and he found no other way out of penury than to leave his family and emigrate to the US of A to search for gold. On the 4th of July 1825 he joined the first group of 52 emigrants to cross the Atlantic on the 54-foot sailing vessel *Restaurationen*. The passage took three months with multiple storms and mishaps. On sailing into New York harbour my exhausted great-grandfather vowed that he would never set foot on a deck again. He had burned his homeland bridge.

Records at the Old New York Hospital on Broadway show that a Mr. Roald Roren was admitted with musket shot wounds in his butt on 14th of February, 1826, after he had been involved in a street battle between Irish immigrants and federal troops. The fact that he was shot in the butt indicates that he probably had been running away. Who knows? What we do know is that a postcard dated May 1st, 1826, arrived in Norway a year later, sent from a town called Dahlonega in Georgia. According to my great Aunt Bertha my great-grandfather was a man of few words. The postcard simply read:

"My dearest Bertha. In America to find gold.  
Roald"

He had come to Cherokee country to find gold. We don't know much more about my great-grandfather's presumably colourful life on the other side of the Atlantic other than according to his gold rush friends he sent many extremely short telegrams back to Norway. Samuel Morse had just invented the electrical telegraph system, and it cost a small fortune to send this modern miracle message across the vast ocean. However, it was a complete waste of money. Only the telegraph operator read all his messages as the transmission wire ended over the other side of a hill east of the telegraph station. Roald never got a reply from his family and friends back in the Land of the Midnight Sun because they never heard a word from him in the first place. Even if the telegraph operator hadn't been a scammer it wouldn't have worked because the laying of the transatlantic telegraph cable had yet to be completed! The only news that came out of the New World was that postcard from Dahlonega.

My grandfather Wilhelm, again on my father's side, retired just past puberty, married the rich widow of a timber merchant, and lived the same intense and hedonistic life as his dad. He was spontaneous and impatient and had the same appetite for women as his male forbearers, and his escapades and interests went in all directions.

Sailing, stamp collection, tennis, chess, music, art, you name it- he could even dance the Argentine tango. He introduced me to the art of sailing and hedonistic philosophy, taught me about the bees and the birds and the Meaning of Life. Grandfather Wilhelm had Norway's most extensive stamp collection, he wrote chess strategies for Oslo's largest newspaper, and he modelled for various famous artists, amongst them Edward Munch. In a church in Oslo there's a four-meter-tall fresco altarpiece of my grandfather robed as Jesus Christ.

His dream of becoming a world-famous concert pianist never came to be. Every Sunday morning his neighbours would close their windows when he dragged the piano out onto his balcony, and with Beethoven turning in his grave, Wilhelm would hammer out *Für Elise*, over and over again.

Apart from writing chess quizzes and shooting squirrels he never did a day's proper work in his entire life. His definition of a meaningful life was getting laid as often as possible in between fun and games. His patient wife Agnes, perhaps due to the fact that she was getting laid among all the other women, did not complain. However, she did not share his views and interests. She was a tolerant and forgiving woman in many ways and managed to keep her promiscuous husband happy and the farm and family running without his involvement.

And finally, there's my own father, Haakon, who desperately wanted to be a sailor. He was too young to sign on for crew and go to sea, so he sneaked aboard a ship bound for the Far East. He was discovered halfway across the North Sea hiding in a lifeboat and was set ashore in London where he found work in a Chinese laundry and finally ended up as a bartender at the legendary Brown's Hotel. The laundry gave him a soap-allergy and the bar multiple hangovers.

Haakon had a pining for the sea and returned to Norway to study navigation and become a sea captain. After several years in the merchant navy, ploughing the oceans of the world, he got a pining for the fjords and returned to Oslo just as Hitler's troops invaded. He joined the police force but did not get on very well with the new Nazi Chief of Police. He was interned and tortured at the Grini concentration camp, but managed to dig his way out, escaping over the mountains to Sweden. The Swedes were neutral during WWII, but not neutral enough. He was arrested by the

Swedish police and sent back to Norway by train. The deal between the Swedish government and the German occupiers in Norway was for the Swedish border guards to arrest and return illegal immigrants, but only if they were criminals. However, the Nazi view was of course that political prisoners were nothing but criminals. Fortunately, my father's accompanying guard was more neutral than the Swedish Hitler-friendly government, and he looked the other way when his prisoner had to relieve himself as the train stopped at a signal light near Gothenburg. My father once again became a stowaway. He slipped unseen on board a freighter bound for Scotland, where he joined up with the Royal Norwegian Navy in exile.

In South Queensferry near Edinburgh in 1942, in between his Atlantic convoy duties, he and his shipmates would turn the town upside down and build up courage to do another voyage to Murmansk, from which they most likely would never return or survive. There was a film set in South Queensferry where the government made propaganda films. There he met my mother who once worked as a hairdresser for Bette Davis. My mother had been married before, to an RAF pilot and had a child with him, my half-sister Giselle. When Wing Commander Rose Phillips was shot down and killed over Germany, my mother-to-be spent a week in grief, pulled herself together and immediately married another young RAF pilot, who also was shot down and killed. The War Office actually encouraged young girls to marry young airman as soon as they were called up, due to the fact that they thought fighting men fought better when there was a young wife waiting for them at home.

Mother had had enough of airmen getting shot out of the sky. Why not go for a sailor instead?

My father won my mother's heart with a pair of nylon stockings he bought for a small fortune on the black market. When the hairdresser told the captain that she was pregnant (with me) he once more "jumped ship" and "enlisted" with Bette Davis instead. Come to think of it, I could have been the son of an American screen idol.

My mother got so mad at him that she threatened to report him to the Admiral of the fleet and to charge my father with weakness and cowardice in the line of duty. Two days later my parents, the hairdresser and the captain, were married. Eight months or so later I came prematurely into the world with a loud bang; I was born the night the Luftwaffe bombed Liverpool- June 27th 1943. I entered this senseless world at war, screaming in an ambulance full of wounded children who were picked up on the way to the hospital from bombed out buildings.

In the hospital in Ainsdale outside Liverpool I was hastily first baptized, then washed and then a doctor cut out a piece of my private part because my Jewish grandmother was in charge. She was always in charge. That's what Jewish mothers do for a living- be in charge.

Anyway, the sirens also started their howling in Ainsdale, and we all managed to get to the shelter in time. The hospital building didn't survive. Neither did the town hall and registrar office. That's why I have no birth certificate. I am born a circumcised Brit with no birth certificate, but I have evidence to show for the circumcised bit, a paper document that is.

Torpedoed in the arctic waters of the Barents Sea and north Atlantic together with his horrific experiences in the German concentration camp took the spark of life out of the otherwise lively Haakon. Easily frustrated and full of anger

and hatred he'd growl at anyone living outside his own bubble world. He hated Germans of course, the Swedes for turning him in, Italians because they ate garlic, and he threw in for good measure Arabs and blacks and the Sami (indigenous) people of northern Norway. He hated the Arabs because, in the Suez Canal, some badass towelhead (his word) Arab sneaked on board and nicked his underwear off the clothesline; blacks because they were black and he really didn't know why he hated the Sami, he just did. He didn't have a dog, so he would beat the living daylight out of me for my slightest "mishaps." Being a war hero, he quickly advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral. Only 50 years old, with Norway being a part of NATO, he was, against his will, bestowed with a German lieutenant as a personal secretary. When the hand-picked and quiet spoken young lad made the grave mistake of clicking his heels together on his first day on the job, my father lost it completely and attacked him, sending him to the hospital for three months with a broken jaw and arm and the removal of his front teeth. The incident hit the headlines and the Navy gave him another medal, another stripe, and a healthy pension. He was so gung-ho on warfare and fighting fascism that he left for Spain to join forces against General Franco, but he arrived too late. He'd got it all wrong. Franco was still a fascist, still alive but the Spanish civil war was long over. He liked Spain. And General Franco was kind of all right since he let the immigrant ex-pats keep their pensions in full.

He finally settled down on the outskirts of Benidorm growing oranges and strolling the beaches taking photos of bikini-designs with his Kodak Instamatic. After my mother died, the hairdresser from Scotland who had held out with him for unbelievably many decades, it didn't really surprise me a bit when he remarried at the ripe age of 82. His new wife was 55; the old Viking dog had still a bit of the old Røren spark and spunk left in him.

That was my father's side of the family.

My mother's side is a totally different cup of English tea. My great-great grandfather spent his entire life stacking stones on top of each other. That's all he did, honestly, and that's about all I know about him. He moved from farmhouse to farmhouse stacking stones in long rows. His stone walls stretched for hundreds of miles across the Scottish Highlands.

His son, my great-grandfather Angus, was a wee bit smarter than his dad and went in a different direction, literally. Downwards. One could make more money digging up the black gold buried deep down under his father's stone walls. He was only twelve years old when he did his first trip into the mine. I've been told that before he was recycled he'd done the trip down 21,600 times! The mine closed around the time when he was old enough to decide for himself what to do with the rest of his life. And what did Angus do? He moved to Wales where he continued to take the elevator up and down the mine shaft until he died of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, due to all the black dust that got stuck in his lungs.

The only highlights in his entire life were the three days his three boys were born. There were also four girls, but they weren't worth a farthing in those days. Those were the days when the mining company paid him 10 guineas if he promised to send his boys down the mine. Which he did, and they all ended up underground too young of age, literally underground. However, there was one exception- my grandfather- David Waddell, the youngest of the three boys..

He was only thirteen years old when he, dressed in his dad's oversized tweed suit and struggling along with a cardboard

suitcase, was sent off to an uncle in Carlisle to be educated. Sewn into the lining of his underpants were 30 guineas. He was trained and educated as a filing clerk and spent nearly the rest of his life shuffling documents in the Foreign Office in London. The only day out of the ordinary was the day he angrily slammed the filing cabinet shut with both hands, clipping the tips off each forefinger. One Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park, he apparently saved a young ballet dancer, Minnie Rombach, from drowning in the Serpentine Lake. Minnie had fallen off a skiff and could not swim. She turned out to be the daughter of a Jewish jeweller, and also my grandmother. They were married shortly after the lake incident.

David was a devout Catholic and could not swim either. Fortunately, he was tall enough for his feet to reach the bottom of the lake. The only highlights in his mundane career were, similar to his father, the days when his seven children were born. That's what I've been told anyway. I'm not so sure. He had been known at times to have said that they were a blessing. I'm not so sure if he thanked the Catholic faith for the size of his family, or blamed it.

There actually was another highlight, though he didn't see it that way. Grandfather David and his family were transferred to the British Embassy in Tokyo where he continued shuffling and filing his never-ending piles of documents. On the first of September 1923, a massive earthquake struck Japan- the most powerful earthquake in living memory, 8.9 on the Richter scale, leaving 30,000 people dead. Tokyo, Kobe, and most of Yokohama was levelled to the ground; Kobe resembled Hiroshima after the bomb.

Minnie and her seven children, who lived on the outskirts of Kobe, survived the quake thanks to a cat. When Grandma saw the cat carrying all her kittens out of the house, she

knew what was coming and ordered the servants to carry out the huge oak table in the living room and place it in the garden. She and her seven children, the maid, the gardener, the cook and the cat with her kittens fit safely under the table, and all hell broke loose. The entire building came down like a house of cards. They all survived, except David who was at work; he possibly lay dead under enormous amounts of rubble. He was pronounced missing and most likely deceased. They never found his body.

Japan's cities were ablaze and in turmoil. Even in the countryside there were riots, chaos, and anarchy. To add to the mayhem, there was a lot of hostility towards Westerners. It took a week for my grandmother, her children, and the house staff to reach the British consulate in Kyoto on the west coast. An amazing story- I have submitted the screen-rights to Oliver Stone and Steven Spielberg. The directors apparently didn't get very excited about it as I never heard back from either one. In any case, the family reached the consulate and were shipped to Shanghai on an American warship.

Walking down the gangway with her children in Shanghai, Grandma Minnie met a surviving employee from the embassy in Kobe. He was happy to see that the entire family had survived the disaster.

"Not my David," she answered. "He is still buried under the collapsed embassy."

"But that's impossible- he just walked down the gangway five minutes ago. I'm sure it was him. I even noticed that the tips of both his forefingers were missing."

It's pretty obvious that there are enormous discrepancies between the men on my father's side and the men on my

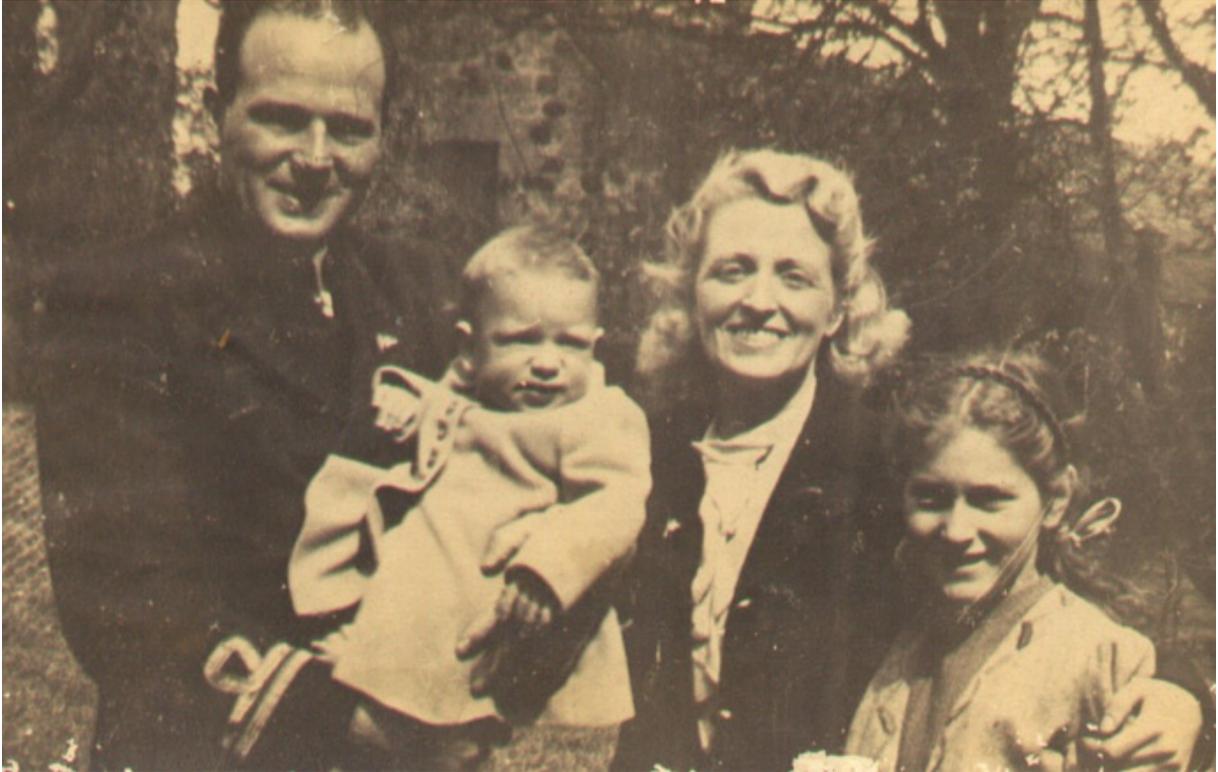
mother's side.

If the story about David's survival is true, and that he took the opportunity to "jump ship" so to speak, we have here a major deviation in my line of genealogical inheritance.

Going back to my father's side, you have four (or maybe more) men with a great appetite for life, guys who could never fit in to what in those days was seen as customary, acceptable, and normal. These guys were restless and adventurous dreamers who lived out each day as if it were their last.

On the other hand, on my mother's side were four generations of men living in a sort of treadmill boredom, living each day as if it was a battle for their survival.

Which of these genes do I carry? If both, which are the dominant genes and how would they determine my destiny? Should I live each day as a challenge and from there on experience victory- or should I clock myself in and out of a factory where my only good memory was the day I won 5 pounds in the lottery or the time when dad came home from a voyage to the USA with a bag of pink jelly-powder? The finished bright red wobbling jelly was solemnly carried from the kitchen as if it were the crown jewels. On its way it slipped off its tray. My parents, my sister, and I tried to grab it, causing it to disintegrate as it fell from hand to hand into a bucket of clothes pegs. We all sat together for hours on the kitchen floor, laughing our heads off while scraping jelly off the pegs. This is about my only good and happy childhood memory of family togetherness.



Family photo 1943. My father Haakon, me, my mother Lily and my half-sister Giselle.

Whenever I was down and low after that incident, my big sister would say, "Remember the jelly in the clothes pegs," and the tears would stop flowing.

Was Grandfather David the odd man out, the first to break the tedious heritage line? Even if I would happen to slip into tediousness, there might be a way out.

Had he really survived the quake? Is there anything in the rumours that he built himself a small yacht and sailed away in secrecy? Could there be something in the story about a Scot with only six complete fingers who had been shipwrecked off Tahiti?

If he did do a runner, was it really an achievement, something to brag about-leaving his wife and kids stranded in Shanghai?

Due to the fact that his remains were never found, my Grandmother never received her widow's pension from the British Government. Until all her kids had grown up and left the nest she stayed in Shanghai, bringing up her children, living in a two-room apartment, and working as a geisha in a Japanese teahouse and a dancer in a Shanghai nightclub.

I was only nine years old when I first heard about Grandpa David's possible vanishing act. Could he really be out there somewhere? Maybe living as a hermit on a desert island or a king in some faraway island paradise- or maybe roaming the seven seas as a pirate?

I gradually got more and more convinced that it was all true, and out there somewhere he was waiting for me. Maybe on Tahiti?

I suddenly had the future lined up. I had a plan. I would someday in the not so distant future build my own ship and sail away to find him.

It became more and more an obsession, and I finally came to a conclusion which side of my family my genes derived from. I knew the path to follow. If I was wrong, with Grandfather David in mind, there was still hope.

## 2. The Explorer

I was named after Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up, and I still do my best to live up to it. My earliest recollection was the Blitz on the great city of London. Not really a recollection, more a sub-conscious reminiscence of the traumatic experience of having to seek shelter in the London Underground when Werner von Braun's bombs fell from the sky. I know the reminiscence is encoded in my hippocampus because I have felt extremely uncomfortable on the few occasions I've been underground in London. (In this case *underground* refers to the tubular, underground railway system and not into hiding or on a secret operation.) I prefer to sit upstairs in the front seat of a big London double-decker bus. I also feel nauseated and a slight touch of terror when I see documentaries with wailing sirens and frightened people running for shelter.

As a military family we were constantly on the move. For a brief period, we lived in Liverpool, very near Penny Lane. With my nanny drowning in pink gin in a nearby pub, I would spend most of the day in a children's playground called Strawberry Fields. Does this ring a bell? I have discovered that John Lennon might have been there at the same time. Just think of it- if my family had stayed in Liverpool, I probably could have become a Beatle! I called John once to find out if he could remember me, but it must have been a wrong number; he didn't answer the phone.

I was only six years old when I first read Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. It took a long time to get through that story, reading it page by page at a snail's pace. I couldn't help myself from drifting into a fantasy world of

swashbuckling pirates, and I became more and more the little boy who encountered dangers and countless adventures to find my missing grandfather. From then on, I was fascinated by stories of pirates and the heroes of the seven seas.

There was no end to my imagination. This happens when kids are lonely.

I didn't have any friends my own age, probably because I was always hanging out with my older half-sister Giselle.

I received the nickname "Sissy," which didn't help me much to fit in with boys of my age. I had other friends, but they were always only a part of my vivid imagination. The nearest friends I had to a living being, or someone who really existed, were the Kings and Queens of Southport.

Southport is a seaside resort on the west coast of England, some twenty miles north of Liverpool. Like every other seaside resort in England the town had a pier, a long wooden structure on stilts which stretched far out to sea. At the end of the pier lay *Pleasure Land* where I would find pleasure in interesting machines, like the mystical Indian fortune-teller in a glass case who was able to predict my future. When I pushed a farthing into the slot I would hear strange music and then the fortune teller's chin would start moving up and down and a little card would pop out.

I was told that I would soon be going on a long journey.

Most intriguing of all was a machine called *What the Butler Saw*. Inside, a roll of black and white photographic cards would spin around very fast and for a penny you could peek through a keyhole and watch a grinning, fat lady remove her clothing all the way down to her underwear. It was the live movement of flashing pictures in this early cinematographic

miracle that caught my eye, not so much the smiling lady in her lacy underwear, and then of course there was the illegality of it all- the challenge of peeping through a key under a notice saying:

FOR ADULTS, ONLY ONE PENNY. (Or was it “FOR ADULTS ONLY, ONE PENNY”?)

What attracted me most, and what made me venture out on the pier so often, were my friends. There were gas powered lamps on green painted metal posts all the way along the pier. On every lamp-post was a royal crest with the name of an English King or Queen. All the Kings and Queens of England were represented, starting with the earliest by the beach and ending with King George VI, right next to *What the Butler Saw*.

On the top of each lamp-post a seagull perched. They all had names, and King George was my best friend. I would spend hours chatting with King George. He didn't have much to say in return, but that didn't matter, he listened patiently. He was my best friend. I would tell him about Jim Hawkins, Billy Bones, and Long John Silver, about Robinson Crusoe and his friend Friday. I would tell him about the great explorers Cook and Magellan, and I candidly disclosed to him my plan to sail away to find my Grandpa and maybe a hidden treasure or two.

Although King George didn't say much, he would occasionally nod and agree and always wanted to know more about my future voyages. And he was always there for me. One day I made him a promise. When I was ready to sail away, I would take him with me. I was convinced he would appreciate coming along for the ride, because he couldn't fly across the ocean by himself. If he could, he would have gone long ago.

I had confided in two grown-ups whom I felt I could trust: "Uncle" Bill, the old man who made candy floss that was the same colour as his pink face, and who always had time to listen; and Charley Jones, the one-legged man who left his other leg on the beach in Normandy. Charley owned and ran the Punch and Judy show, a puppet-show where Mr. Punch was continuously beating his wife Judy on the head with a stick. There was a policeman involved also and all he did was to beat the shit out of Mr. Punch. It was, in fact, quite a disgusting show of violent entertainment for children. Maybe this was what caused my emerging pacifism.

Charley took a liking to me because while all the kids would sit watching the show in front of the stage, I would be behind the scene, peeking through a hole in the tarp to see how the puppets worked. When the puppet-show manager saw what I was doing, he did not chase me away but instead asked if I would like to come inside to give him a hand on Saturdays and Sundays when there was no school. Both Uncle Bill and Charley said my ideas on nautical adventures were great but they kept telling me that it was more important to go to school. They finally convinced me that I should get an education of sorts and learn math to be able to navigate and geography to be able to know where to go before setting off on such an adventurous undertaking.

When my father discovered my relationship with these two uneducated but understanding men I received a two-month curfew. Education was more important than anything else. He said I wouldn't grow if I was to spend the rest of my life spinning candy floss and messing around with puppets. Growth was necessary if I was to be a sea captain and be able to see beyond the horizon. He had a strange way of saying things, my dad. Surely it wouldn't be an issue if I was a bit on the short side. It would be just a matter of climbing up the mast. Such nonsense only intensified my belief that,

with two exceptions, all grown-ups were either potential liars or just plain stupid.

My parents would often go out at night partying, celebrating the end of the Great War. Every time I asked them where they were going, they would answer, "Out to see a man about a dog." I never got to see that dog. I just became even more convinced that all grown-ups were compulsive liars.

Then came that terrible day when everybody was running frantically around shouting, "The King is dead, King George is dead!"

I was miles away from the sea but ran all the way to the pier not believing a word what everybody was screaming about. It was all a big lie. There he was, my best friend, very much alive and perched on his lamp-post. I decided there and then never to believe any grown-up person anymore, and I told King George the sixth to meet me the following day by the lake at noon. It was time to go.

The sky was overcast and dull grey, giving off a light drizzle. There was no wind. Hardly a day to go sailing, but the planning and preparations had been going on for such a long time. It was now or never. I had to hurry. It wouldn't take long before they would start missing me at school and would start organizing a posse to hunt me down.

For several months I had been secretly building a ship. This was to be the day, the moment of truth, the day on which I was to cast off. The ship was built to carry me and King George across the ocean, far away from my dad, from schools, teachers, homework, washing up, house-arrest, and all that had made life no more than the an ultimate misery.

I would cross the seven seas and experience fantastic adventures. Adventures like the ones I had read about in the Hornblower books. It took an hour by bicycle to get from my house to the “sea.” A rolled-up sail was fastened to the back of my bike. The sail was made from three cotton sacks sewn together by my big sister. She had promised not to tell anyone about the voyage.

It just could not be helped that the captain’s uniform looked suspiciously like an English Primary School uniform turned inside-out. However, the motheaten black coat with brass buttons helped make me appear more nautical. It was a present from Charlie Jones. It was barely long enough to cover my bare, frozen knees. I didn’t care about my freezing knees; I was on my way to warmer climates. Around my waist I carried a wide leather belt with a sword made out of marine plywood.

On my way I passed many small “seas” but my destination was a sea so huge that you could hardly see the other side. *When I get to the other side of the ocean, wondrous things will happen,* I thought. I was puzzled by that fact that it seemed as if every “sea,” or more accurately, every pond of standing polluted water, contained a partly submerged, rusty, broken bedstead head. Such an obstruction would surely be a hazard to navigation.

Little did I know that such an obstacle would soon change my life.

KEEP OUT- TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED read the sign as I turned off the main road down a narrow path. I wondered what “prosecuted” meant. Could it be a fate worse than keel-hauling, the plank, or even the cat o’ nine tails? I hid the bicycle under some bushes. The grass all around was as tall as me. The path twisted and turned down

to the water's edge with other paths continuously branching off to nowhere, probably made on purpose to throw robbers and customs officers off track. And there she lay, totally inconspicuous amid the high grass.

She bore the name HMS EXPLORER, written on her bow in big dramatic letters. She was a full-rigger, twelve feet long-eighteen if you counted the bowsprit. Her decks were made of solid oak and possibly a part of a garage door because you could read "NO PARKI" on it. Her decks were flawlessly secured with hemp rope to three empty oil-drums. Two of the drums were missing the filler cap, but that was not a problem as the holes were above the waterline and on her port side. I expected the heaviest seas to come from starboard, from the direction of the gas-works. At that moment in time I had no idea of the fatal consequences such filler cap holes would cause in the very distant future, on the other side of the world.

A low railing surrounded the deck and she had a little deck-house aft. The deck house was a bit too small to seek cover in case of a storm. However, it contained some pretty important nautical equipment that would come in handy on such a long voyage. It was obvious what was front and back, or more precisely, bow and stern on this magnificent ship. There was a long bowsprit protruding from a hole in the forward oil-drum. It took a whole day to make that hole!

In addition to the deck-house there was one more important item on board-a cannon. The EXPLORER was definitely no warship, but you never knew what dangers lay ahead out there on the seven seas. I had no gun-powder or shot. I would just have to improvise. That is not very difficult when you're only six years old. The great thing about the cannon was that it could also be used as a telescope. It didn't take long to raise the mast, but the forestay was too short so I

had to lengthen it with my belt. It didn't really matter as I had lost my sword somewhere along the road. It wouldn't matter if my pants dropped either. Good thing I had the cannon!

The sail was attached to a yard- previously a broomstick. The shrouds and stays ran down from the masthead to the railing. King George had not arrived, but I could wait no longer as a sudden breeze set in from the northwest. A length of galvanized wire, serving as a mooring line, was cast off and the sail billowed. The EXPLORER was finally under way. A brass band played *Britannia Rule the Waves* and the crowds cheered and shouted in unison, "BON VOYAGE!"

I did not look back. My head was held high and my eyes were fixed eagerly on the horizon ahead. If I had turned around and looked back, I would have noticed that I had left my rudder behind. Never mind. Heyerdahl on the Kon-Tiki didn't steer, he just let the winds and currents take him across the ocean and eventually he arrived at his destination.

I had better check the chart. The rain had made a huge ink smudge but I could still figure out my overall surroundings. On my port side I had China, to starboard India, behind was England of course- where the wind came from-and somewhere up ahead lay Norway, a land where the sun shone at night and trolls were as big as houses with trees growing up their noses and who lived under stone bridges where they kept their *hulder* wives imprisoned. (A *hulder* was a seductive forest creature found in Scandinavian folklore.) At least that was what my father had told me. Just another pack of lies of course. If it were true that the sun shone at night, it should get pretty nice and warm there? A good reason to keep on that course.

It was time to have something to eat so that I would not succumb to scurvy. The ship's provisions consisted of biscuits and a bar of Cadbury's milk chocolate. The biscuits had disappeared; probably there had been rats on board. Dead ahead lay an uncharted hazard to navigation- a half-submerged rusty bedstead head. I was on collision course with this peril and had no steering! My starboard shroud got tangled up with the rusty contraption, resulting in her Majesty's Ship veering broadside to the wind and heeling slightly to starboard. Water rushed through the holes that were by now underwater and the EXPLORER sank slowly and gracefully into the mud, with only her mast above the water.

Only the swallows high above were witness to the tragic maiden voyage and the muddy, depressed young captain wading ashore. There was going to be some keel-hauling executed by the Commander in Chief when he arrived home.

That's how my childhood passed. Dreams of sailing the seven seas, finding hidden treasures, and later, during puberty, topless beautiful, smiling Tahiti women wading out through the surf to greet me and lay wreaths of flowers round my neck.

I actually saw very little of my parents. Father was out at sea most of the time and my mother was always on the move working on various film sets. My older half-sister became my "mother" and baby-sitter and we became very close. My baby-sitter would always take me with her on her evenings out on the town. That's how I learned to dance, how to mix a pink gin, a horses neck, and a shandy; how to kiss a girl without drooling, what to expect the day I became a teenager, and how to win the hearts of girls. At ten years old I knew practically everything there was to know about the birds and bees.

When I was not attending school, Giselle would take me with her- everywhere- and when my mother found out that I was spending a lot of time at dance halls and sitting outside pubs she got really mad. She wasn't much into corporal punishment. She left that to my father. Every time I did something wrong she would yell, *あなたのお父さんが家に帰ってくるまで待つだ* け””- Japanese for *Just wait till your dad comes home*.

He did not come home very often so the amount of corporal punishment from his side accumulated over time in accordance with my so-called bad behaviour. If I tried to defend myself she would shout “*黙れ* yacamash,” which was Japanese for *shut-the-fuck-up*. That's about all I know in that language.

The only solution was to send me off to a boarding school in Bristol, a bastion of cruelty. My only contact was with my closest friend and ally, my sister Giselle, with the help of Her Majesty's Postal Service. I wrote her horrific accounts of the torture and torment I was going through.

I made a bet of fives marbles and a lollipop with my classmates that I would dare to climb over the wall that separated the girls from the boys, kiss a girl on her lips and climb back again within twenty seconds. This unfortunately did not go unnoticed by the school's headmaster. After morning prayers, I received ten lashes in front of one hundred fellow students. It didn't really matter- I had won the bet. What did matter were the tears streaming down my face- very embarrassing to say the least. Since then, I have had a problem kissing girls.

Then there was the incident of the revolving doors. I would take a flying start and do a five-time merry-go-round hanging on to the bar on the door. Unfortunately, my Latin

teacher got caught in the maelstrom with a pile of books in her arms. Another ten lashes. Since then I have had a problem passing through revolving doors. How's that for an education!

At the time my sister was 17 years old, but could have passed for 27 if she put on a lot of make-up and the appropriate dress, nylon stockings, and high heels. She came to the boarding school pretending to be my mother and released me from hell to heaven. Together we moved in secrecy to the seaside resort of Torquay where she enlisted me in a Rudolf Steiner school. While there I learned to think for myself, social survival skills, and my favourite subject, astronomy. For nine months we lived happily together in Torquay with me attending the Steiner school until the day when mum and dad asked the headmaster of the boarding school in Bristol where the hell their son was, and the shit really did hit the fan.

At this time my father had a case of post-traumatic stress disorder due to his convoy duty during the war. He lost command of his ship and was given an office job. That didn't help his nightmares and antagonism at all. It just made them worse.

Against my mother's will, we moved to Norway. Giselle enlisted in The London Art Academy and stayed behind. That didn't help me either, having to lose my life's confidant and caring support.

### 3. The Dice Man

I was ten years young and living in a strange country where nobody understood a word of what I was saying. It wasn't easy for a young English-speaking lad to fit in, especially wearing a blazer, striped tie, and short pants. Not being able to speak the language, I was seen as a *tyskerunge*, the son of a German occupying soldier. The enemy. Nobody spoke English in Norway at that time. I knew a few Japanese swear words which didn't help much.

The educational system didn't know how to deal with foreign kids, so their only resort was to put me in a school for children with learning difficulties and arrange a "specially designed" pedagogical curriculum. They seated me in the back of the classroom to translate a book of my choice from Norwegian to English. It would have worked better the other way around. The book of my choice was naturally Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

It took me half a year to translate that book- a long time as I constantly drifted away into the story and only came back to reality when I got a broadside from the teacher's desk. The new language came on fast, not due to my translation, but from learning it on the street. The bullying from my peers decreased when I managed to tell them that the reason for me being "speechless" was due to the fact that I'd been shipwrecked and had lived alone on a desert island for a long time, and that I had been discovered and saved by a captain of a warship, a captain who had adopted me and was now my father.

I must have been very convincing when I pretended to have an anxiety attack and asked the headmaster to summon my father. I knew he was at work and would arrive in full naval uniform. My tormentors were really impressed. The bullying decreased somewhat, but not entirely.

The day we as a family were to move from the south all the way up to the world's northernmost town I invited all my bullying "friends" to a party on board my father's ship which would be docked off the town hall.

My greatest childhood revenge took place as I was comfortably on my way north on a train. I heard later that fifty kids arrived on the dock only to find a rusty old barge with a note taped to her hull. SWEET REVENGE IS MINE. STOP BULLYING THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT. GONE SAILING WITH MY FATHER. ENJOY YOURSELVES AND F\*\*\* YOU ALL-PETER LONGSTOCKING.

Pippi Longstocking is a fictional character in a series of children's books by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren. Nine-year-old Pippi is unconventional, assertive, and has superhuman strength. Her father is a pirate somewhere in the South Pacific.

Kirkenes was a depressing and desolate town, so far north that night lasted from October until March. However, it actually turned out to be true that the sun shone at night, although only during the summer months. Apart from the polar foxes that raided our garbage bin, there was not much in the way of excitement, and the only good news to brighten up my dark, barren, and arctic world was that my sister Giselle was coming from England to visit us and to enrol at the University in Oslo. On her passage across the North Sea she met a man who she found "interesting." They

dated a couple of times in Oslo before taking a trip up north to us.

I didn't like the guy for some reason, and he didn't like me because his girlfriend spent too much time with me.

After only one week we said goodbye, and she and her friend returned to Oslo. She soon found out that there was something "wrong" with him. After several arguments, where he turned quite violent, she broke up with him. Soon after that we got the bad news.

He had pleaded with her and asked if they could meet on a deserted beach outside Oslo. He wanted to say he was sorry and start over again. Apparently, according to the court reports, she put up quite a fight before he ended her life, stabbing her fifteen times with a carving knife.

Murders were rare in Norway in those days. It was headline news for a long time. The glamorous English student so tragically taken away by a psychopath.

In order to protect me, I was not told the truth. The big lie was that the most important person in my life had gone to Australia and would not be coming back for a long time and that my parents would be going with her, but would soon return. I was sent away to a distant relative, my Uncle Hans, far away up a hundred-mile-long fjord, where there was no radio and miles away from newspapers and people. Four months into my stay I heard my uncle arguing with my parents on the telephone. When it was over my uncle said, "Let's go fishing, Peter boy."

He told me that it was all a big lie. Giselle would never come back. He gently told me what had happened. I still haven't got over it. I never will. I get tears in my eyes just writing about it.